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Social Capital and Relational Coordination in General Practice

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Introduction

The Danish welfare system with universal access to health care is built around the primary health care. All Danish residents have free and direct access to general practitioners (GPs) as well as access to specialist and hospital care. The general practice in Denmark is going through changes and moving toward a more collaborative practice form. The numbers of healthcare personnel whom are not physicians have been rising, giving a need for more coordination and collaboration between the healthcare personnel in a practice.

The aim of the study is to measure organizational social capital and relational coordination in Danish general practice, explore two concepts, and what influence these two concepts.

Methods

This is a quantitative study based on a questionnaire survey, which measures organizational social capital and relational coordination. The questionnaire was sent to every Danish GPs and their staff, approximately 2074 practices with about 2 - 15 staff members in each practice. 702 practices (3029 individuals) have responded.

Results

The results from the survey showed a correlation between social capital and relational coordination. There was significant variation between respondents scoring of social capital and relational coordination depending on function. Each practice showed significant variation in their overall social capital and relational coordination score depending on practice type. Geography location also showed to be significant for a practice's relational coordination. And the ratio between patients and employees in a practice was significant for social capital.

Conclusion

The results shows that solo practices have higher social capital and relational coordination than cooperative and partnership practices, and that practice with a low patient to employee ratio have higher relational coordination, which goes against the tendency of practices becoming bigger. This is interesting as there is a general move towards larger practices from both the political side as well as healthcare professionals, in particular doctors. We know from other studies that relational coordination is associated with treatment quality and consequently general practice may become a workplace with declining job satisfaction and treatment quality.